**THE SILVER LINING - MESSAGES OF HOPE AND CHEER BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**26. THE REALMS OF THE BLEST by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"And so shall we ever be with the Lord."*

*1 Thessalonians 4:17*

I WANT to turn your attention to that blessed land in which our Saviour rules as King, and where our departed have ceaseless communion, with Him. I know it is out of fashion to meditate about heaven. It is regarded as somewhat effeminate even to speak of the abodes of the blessed. I suppose it partly arises from what is regarded as a very healthy disparagement of mere emotion and sentiment. It seems to be commonly thought that people who ponder much upon heaven have their fibre softened and their faculties generally debilitated and impaired.

I remember that when I first came out of college, and took up the work of the Christian ministry, I fervently shared this common belief, and I felt with a good many other young reformers that instead of singing about the things of the blessed and the doings of the eternal life, I would engage the interest of my congregation in the condition of the slums, and the uncleanness of the common streets of our own city. Rather than waste sentiment and thought upon the life that is to be, I would seek to concentrate all our energy in bettering the life that is.

I think I have learned a larger lesson. I have discovered that no man works less eagerly in the slums, because now and again he has a view of the City of God, and no man has a softened fibre because he stimulates his imagination in trying to realise the life that is to be. What kind of power does it impair? What kind of faculty does it soften, to think occasionally about the land to which we are all hastening? Does it soften the will? Does it in any way bedim the conscience? Does it narrow or strain the affections? Let us be definite in our charge, let us seek to put our finger upon that particular part of our mental or spiritual constitution which is in any way injured by the steady, frequent, regular contemplation of the Eternal Rest. In what way does it unfit men for practical life? In what way does it create dreamers? "I should like to meet with a few of these dreamy people," says Faber, "first to be sure of the fact, which I venture to doubt, and secondly to be sure I should condemn their dreaminess, which I doubt also."

Well, now, suppose we do give a little of our time to thought about the better land, and the Lord of the better land, what may we hope to accomplish by it? I have been lately spending a very busy week among the saints, that I might discover from their experience what they have found from such contemplation. What do they find? Here is a quaint phrase in which one of the saints expresses his sense of the value of heavenly meditation. "It will prevent a shyness between thy soul and God." Love is exquisitely shy, and our love for our Saviour has, I think, in its beginning, just this little touch of shyness which wears away as we engage in frequent talk and communion with Him.

What else have the saints found in heavenly contemplation? Here is Richard Baxter's answer: "It will open the door between thy head and thy heart," and then he goes on to say, in what I consider a very suggestive phrase: "He is usually the best Christian who has the readiest passage from his brain to his heart." Do you see the significance of that? We take into our minds a certain truth, a certain mental conception; if we meditate upon the truth received, the ministry of meditation transfers the truth from the mind to the affections. It becomes mare than a mental apprehension; it becomes a part of our love. It turns a thing of the brain into a power of the life. It begins to energise the passions, waking them, feeding them, nourishing those parts of our life which are the most potent in determining our activity.

What else will it accomplish? It will bring the needed inspiration in times of temptation and distress. "When should we take our cordial," says our friend the Puritan, "but in times of fainting?" When the tempter is very near you, or when distress seems to overwhelm you like a flood--then is one of the seasons when you ought to turn your mind to the land of the blessed, because from that contemplation there will come nutriment and inspiration by which you shall be sustained in your darkest hour and carried through in safety. Now that is most characteristic of Samuel Rutherford. I confess that when I am reading one of his letters, and I find that he is dealing with some season of distress, some season of overwhelming tribulation, I almost welcome it because I know he will bring out some of the heavenly counsel and experience which he has acquired in season of communion with God. "I had rather," he says, "I had rather have Christ's buffet and Christ's love stroke than any king's kiss." He weighs his pain over against the coming glory. In the hour of his sorrow he meditates upon the coming bliss, and the contemplation of the bliss transfigures the present sorrow.

Find out the best place whence you can send your thoughts heavenward. Richard Baxter said that he always found that his "fattest time" was in the evening, from the sunset to the twilight. It may not be your best time, it may not be your convenient time; but find a place and find an hour when you can send your imagination among the realms of the blessed, to remind yourselves of the country towards which you are going, of the inheritance to whose possession you are succeeding, and give yourself the sense of the dignity of one who has part and lot in the matter, who is a partaker of the Divine nature, and will share with the Eternal the blessedness of eternity.

What are some of the characteristic glories of the life which is to be spent for ever with the Lord? I can tell you nothing you do not know; but perhaps just by repeating a commonplace in a fresh way I may give it a certain newness.

It is a life of rest. I do not wonder that Faber, in one of his books, when he had mentioned this word "rest," added the sentence: "Let us stay and suck that word as if it were a honeycomb." Now people who are never tired cannot know the significance of rest. But people who have to labour very hard, and amid very straitened circumstances, find in the word a delicious consolation. I remember once talking with a fisher-woman who had lost her husband and two sons at sea, away down in Cullercoats Bay on the Northumberland coast. I asked her what she liked most to think about when she thought about the land beyond, and I was not surprised to hear her say, "And there shall be no more sea." And when you go to very tired people, people who are not only physically tired but mentally worn, there is no word which appeals to them with such sweet significance as just this common word "rest." I said to one of my people the other day, as I stood by his dying bed: "Rest comes at length!" And the tired eyes lit up, and I knew the meaning of the expectancy that leaped into his hungry eyes. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light upon them nor any heat"; "there shall be no more pain."

It is a life of quest. It is not a life of mere passivity, but a life of glorious activity. First of all our quest is to be under the immediate leadership of our Lord: "He shall lead them to living fountains of water." The unveiling of new things, the unsealing of new springs! When we have dropped the clay and the veil of the flesh, we shall stand out with immeasurably increased powers of perception, and going with our Lord as our personal conductor among the wonders of unveiled truth and all the splendours of glory, with our immeasurably intensified powers, we shall find countless kinds of new and unimaginable delights break out before us on every side.

It is a life of service. I like that little phrase that Swedenborg uses--and among all the apparent fictions and fancies and flimsy conceits of Swedenborgianism you sometimes come across what you feel at once to be rare gems of superlative truth--Swedenborg says concerning the employments of heaven: "There will be occupation but no labour." The worker is never tired His activity is never toil! It is a life of uses, and every soul will have its individual enterprise.

And it is a life of wondrous communion. First of all, it is communion with one another. I sometimes say to my people when they are telling me their sorrows and their troubles, and when neither the teller nor the hearer can find even the faintest clue, "You will explain it to me some day!" I say it as a glorious conviction that one of the joys and delights of the heavenly country will be the perfect understanding of the things that have bewildered us here. We shall get the clue, and we shall tell one another the story which down here we found a burden and a destroyer of our peace.

But the joy of fellowship will be not only fellowship one with another, but fellowship with those spirits who "have never, never known a fallen world like this." If you were to ask me to put my finger upon one page in all the published writings of Dr. Dale which is written most deeply on my mind and heart, it would be that glorious passage in which he is expounding this great word to the Ephesians: "to the principalities and powers in the heavenly place there shall be made known the manifold wisdom of God." Dr. Dale speaks about the redeemed pilgrims of time telling the inhabitants of the heavenly city who have never known our estate, who have never known our sin, the story of redemption, and of how our hunger was met and how our peace was renewed; and they will tell the pilgrims about the unclouded day, about the far-away time when sin had not fallen upon the world, and all about the wonderful developments and experiences of the unsullied life.

But pre-eminently, and above all other things, it is to be a life of fellowship with the Lord. "For ever with the Lord! Amen, so let it be!" "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall tabernacle among them." It is a homely figure; it is the figure of a meeting-place of many tents, and our God comes and adds His tent to the number. He is one with us, one among us; allowing us to go into His tent, and coming into our tent, a life of shared fellowship, a life of close intimacy in the things of the blessed.

Well, now, let us give a little time to thinking about these things. In twelve months' time some of us will probably be in the heavenly country. Surely it is well just to think a little about the glories and beauties of the land. "Half-an-hour in heaven," said a working man to me one day, "half-an-hour in heaven and I am ready for anything!" Spend a little time with the Lord now, and you will be prepared to spend the "for ever with the Lord." Amen.